

WATSONVILLE

City considers fluoridation

By **LIZ KELLAR**

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Thirty-six years after the city's voters last defeated efforts to fluoridate Watsonville's water, the issue is back.

The City Council will hear presentations for and against fluoridation at a special session Tuesday evening.

It is difficult to gauge how the city's residents will greet the current efforts.

At the July 10 council meeting, a San Jose representative of Citizens for Safe Drinking Water presented council members with a packet of information decrying the use of fluoride.

There does not appear to be much organized local opposition, however.

"This happened very quickly in Watsonville, and the people are now just learning about the issue," said Maureen Jones of the national anti-fluoride group. "I've been helping out the people who live here because of my seven years of experience with the issue."

Jeanette Crosetti is one local who opposes fluoridation.

"It's an issue of our freedom of choice," she said. "It's also an issue of protection of the water system."

A committee organized to support fluoridation efforts in the city drew support from many in the medical and dental community, as well as from many social service organizations.

Council members Rafael Lopez, Ramon Gomez and Richard De La Paz endorsed the committee.

In a letter to the council, pediatrician Michelle Simon wrote that "it seems to be one of the biggest problems I see daily in my practice in examining otherwise well children. Frankly, I have only seen such dental decay in such prominence in poor children in Central America."

The city is citing the need to comply with legislation enacted in 1996, mandating fluoridation in water systems with more than 10,000 service connections.

The cost is expected to be higher than other cities because Watsonville's water supply is a network of 11 wells and a filter plant, meaning the city would have to install 12 independent injection systems.

City staff estimate the initial capital cost would be \$750,000, which they hope to fund through grants. Operation and maintenance is estimated at \$265,000 per year. To fund this, the city would need to increase water rates by 5.3 percent, adding \$12.60 per year to the average residential water customer's bill.

In 1988, the Santa Cruz City Council opposed fluoridation. City voters voted against fluoridation the following year.

The Watsonville City Council meets Tuesday at 7 p.m. in City Council Chamber, 250 Main St.

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